



# **In situ Art exhibitions as a support of a sustainable development policy in the post-industrial areas and new regional territories?**

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*“IN SITU” ART EXHIBITION AS A SUPPORT OF A SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN THE POST-INDUSTRIAL AREAS AND NEW  
REGIONAL TERRITORIES*

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**Summary :**

Deceleration of industry have disturbed the ecologic industrial system composed by the influence of the primary industries upon landscapes, human relations and way of life.

This phenomenon has triggered in the post-industrial contest new relation ships toward the notion of “time”, “space” and “social relations”.

The purpose of this paper is to show how art and globally curating can be considered as a tool of sustainable government in new territories.

**Résumé :**

Le phénomène de désindustrialisation a perturbé l’écosystème généré par les mono industries, tant au niveau de l’environnement paysager qu’au niveau des relations humaines et des modes de vie. Il a ainsi créé de nouveaux repères au temps, à l’espace et au social.

L’objectif de cet article est de montrer comment l’action culturelle (ou management culturel) peuvent être considérés comme des outils d’une politique de développement durable dans les nouveaux territoires.

**Key words :** post-industrial territories, former coal mines, cultural management/ art curating/cultural action, sustainable development policy, *in situ* art.

**Mots-clefs :** territoires post-industriels, anciennes mines de charbon, management culturel/action culturelle/ organisation d’évènements artistiques, politique de développement durable, art *in situ*.



## INTRODUCTION

The growth of the number of disused industrial sites results from industrial civilisation. This truism is caused by the race for profitability, which implies to give up techniques and sites that are not competitive anymore. Industrial countries entered a period of dematerialisation of their economy by closing factories as well as the access to a society of information, whereas some other countries like India or China, on the contrary, open up to it frenetically. The management of sites and territories where the production has ended up, is not going anymore to be the prerogative of the so-called countries of first industrialisation established. In Asia, India, and in all the emerging countries, an environment is being built, and, little by little, it is going to be more and more alien to the old industrial countries that are turned to the research of a society of ecologic balance. This state of fact is likely to be changing today without our being able to account for it. It should be mentioned that the third stage of evolution of the society, as described by Toffler<sup>1</sup>, is distinguished by the domination of information, by technology and by the huge diversity of sub-cultures. This stage of evolution overcomes these countries. Meanwhile, the material industrial economy is growing extremely fast. This telescoping in the race for “up to date” disturbs the predictions of the evolution, as described by projectivists and sociologists like D. Bell, Bourdieu or even Castells. It could, for sure, generate territories suffering from the obsolescence of their leading industry. Considering such a telescoping and these uncertain evolutions, we may find it accurate to exhibit what is brought by cultural action. The latter is turned to an art “in situ” in the reconstruction of the cultural identity of a mining territory suffering from desindustrialisation and from a territory in research of a new identity, facing new rules of gatherings of the communal territories. Consequently, I am going to give the example of the association “Culture Commune”, located in the town of Loos-en-Goelle.

### 1. CULTURAL ACTION AS A MODE OF RE-CREATION OF THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF A LOCATION AFFECTED BY DESINDUSTRIALISATION.

The case of the association “Culture Commune” on the basis of 11/19 of Loos-en-Goelle.

#### 1.1. Summary of political, economic and historical context.

Culture Commune is an artistic Factory, or more precisely a “Theatrical Factory” which was born in the old block of mine of the base 11/19<sup>ii</sup> during the closing of the last well of concentration of this zone.

After the announcing of the closing of the seat of concentration of Loos-en-Goelle (1986), the city hall of Loos-en-Goelle proposed to announce its intention to buy the site in order to keep it as a symbol of the mining activity and to make of it the first French “écopôle” articulated around three main lines : culture, environment, and leisure.

The stake is quite important : more than 130 years of intense exploitation of coal dragged lots of migrants coming from the East countries, and from Maghreb. The mine represented their safety as well and their loss. It had brought them some bread, housing, instruction in compensation of a strong submission to professional culture. In 1990, the number of inhabitants was extremely low. The population feels like an orphan, and feels apathetic, in need of esteem of itself. Indeed, the local cultural identity was there, as in many other industrial towns that were closely linked to the main economic activity. A question was then raised to rebuild a cultural identity that would show respect towards history while offering to these inhabitants the keys to get involved in the future economic and cultural dynamic. The access to a new cultural offering and to new technologies were the keys of the cultural main line of the project “écopôle”, located on the old mining site of 11/19. The latter was constituted of the 3 following activity zones:

- La Chaîne des Terrils (C.P.I.E.), which aims at preserving and highlighting coal tips and mining wastelands of Nord-Pas-de-Calais. It brings guided tours of the coal tips activities of education to environment and teaching skills of discovering of nature, along with tourist activities and leisure activities in the surroundings.
- Culture Commune, an association of 34 towns of the Coal Field, whose prospect is to create and codirect shows, to welcome artists in residence, to entertain artistic studios, and to manage a multimedia resources center. The association got the status of national scene.
- Firms involved in fields about environment and about sustainable development (CD2E, CERDD...).

Finally, the highest coal tips of Europe (146m of height), sites of the history of mine, constitute guided tour locations as well as sport and leisure places. Paragliding is being practised there as well as horse riding or bicycle races.



### **1.2. Politics and cultural actions of the association Culture Commune, directed towards the old mining territory.**

The cultural project of the association is divided in three main lines : creation/diffusion, forming, and communication. The planning is built through a work of dialogue and negotiation with the different partners : the mayor and the concerned deputy mayors, professionals, local partners, artists, regional institutions, technical services...

The planning extends from September to July in a broad display of subjects : theatre, dances, street arts, circus arts, displays of urban culture, young public, reading, theatrical writing, multimedia...represented as public shows, concerts, formations, and meetings with the public.

Along with the fonction of advice or "artistic boss" of the Coal Field, Culture Commune codirects cultural and artistic actions (studios of artistic practices, actions of attendance of the viewer, diffusion of shows, meeting and residence of artists, artistic creation). All this concretely corresponds to the managing of the financial risk between the association and the welcoming town. It also initiates studios targeting amateurs' artistic creation (mainly local ones) directed by professional artists whose performance is planned for the season (master class, trainings) ; finally it engages coproduction with different partners (municipality, cultural structure).

### **1.3. Juridical status of the association Culture Commune**

Culture Commune is a kind of hydra with several heads. It is an intermunicipal association of artistic and cultural development which started with the affiliation of 22 towns in the territory extending from Lens to Lévin. Today, it gathers 34 member towns (namely, about 385 000 inhabitants). This association (law 1901) was rewarded by the status of pluridisciplinary National Scene in 1999. Its board of directors is composed of representatives of the 34 member towns, along with the District of the area and of the state (DRAC), the three of them being founding members. Since 1992, the association opened up to new members of the civil society through the creation of three schools : "associations and partner structures", "intermediary" (representative of the public), "firms". Each year, these schools elect their representatives at the board of directors. The dimension "advice and initiative" of Culture Commune unfolds in listening and exchanging with artists, on the one hand, and responsible people of the welcoming places (owners of medium), on the other hand.

This intermediary position obliged Culture Commune to have an individualised procedure of advice towards every single town as well as a procedure of action, through the partial establishment of the cultural project.

## **2 - CONCLUSION**

The look and the new cultural tone of the Coal Field were based on the tonality inspired by the association Culture Commune. What mattered was to fill what was needed about professional artistic supply on the whole coal field, to generate a festival activity as a temporary highlight in the pervading morosity of a town cruelly stricken by unemployment. What was important was also to allow people to catch the train of the race for our new technologies by proposing them an access to these technologies. The project of the association was created in 1990. It followed the study and a foreshadowing directed by the NPDC's county council. It was supported by the regional council NPDC, the Ministry for the Arts, and it was ordered to the boss of the cultural association : CL. One of the main driving forces of the initiative was to have bet on the diffusion of a new cultural approach so as to favour the development and the transformation of the coal field. The other driving force was to have played on the cooperative aspect of the different towns to stick to this cultural project. The action's stake concerns the artistic and sensitive stimulation of the population, but also concerns support service traditions, which define the mining culture. "The singularity of Culture Commune, and even its originality, thus result from the order of tutorships of a founding project on the scale of the coal field. The latter would involve a maximum of towns in new and demanding cultural politics involving a dynamic of intermunicipal complementarity and solidarity. This would favour the development and the transformation of this territory. Culture Commune codirects its actions with the towns and the cultural structures of this territory and doesn't have its "plan of diffusion", and yet Culture Commune is a real cultural structure which has a regional and a national fulfillment with real local roots for its actions"<sup>iii</sup>. Today, the towns of the community of Lens-Lévin and its suburbs display a will of sustainable development based on a social and a cultural project which Culture Commune entirely belongs to. The towns of the community of Lens-Lévin and its suburbs also show a will of an economic dynamic in the respect of the way of life and the framework of the environment.

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<sup>i</sup> According to Toffler's model, each new stage pushes the old society and settles. A.T. etc.

<sup>ii</sup> In order to reduce the cost of production off the floor, the direction of mines decided to gather several wells around one strongly equipped well only. The well N°11 is booked to become the "seat of concentration" of the group of Lens-Liévin. All the other wells of the group are then ramified by huge galleries. That way, the coal rises through a modern structure, erected for this new configuration : the well 19.  
The settlement, located hardly 10 metres far from the old pit, is entirely realised in reinforced concrete. The coaler site will then have the first name 11/19.

<sup>iii</sup> Culture Commune. *Presentation*. Internal document that can be found on the site of Culture Commune, p.2.